

FOOD OR RENT?
FOOD NOT RENT!
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RENT FORGIVENESS GUIDE
FOR TENANTS UNABLE TO PAY RENT DURING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

TENANT STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE: PROTECT YOURSELF AS MUCH AS YOU CAN WHILE NOT PAYING RENT DURING THE COVID CRISIS. INCLUDED IS A LETTER TO SEND TO YOUR LANDLORD, NOTIFYING THEM THAT YOU WILL NOT BE PAYING YOUR RENT FOR THE MONTH, AS WELL AS INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO JOIN ONLINE MEETINGS OF YOUR LOCAL CHAPTER OF THE L.A. TENANTS UNION, SO THAT YOUR DECISION OR INABILITY TO PAY WILL BE JOINED WITH THAT OF TENANTS ACROSS LOS ANGELES. YOU ARE NOT ALONE. TOGETHER WE CAN DEMAND THE RENT FORGIVENESS WE SO CLEARLY NEED. SHARE THIS GUIDE WITH YOUR FAMILY, YOUR FRIENDS, AND YOUR NEIGHBORS.



VIEW THE GUIDE ONLINE:
WWW.BIT.LY/FOODNOTRENT

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Can you pay rent on April 1st? What about May? Where will you get the money to pay for food, medications, necessities? What about your neighbors, your family, your friends? How long will this crisis last? Choose food. Choose medications. Choose your future. Keep your rent.

We do not know how long we will be out of work and confined to our homes. We do not trust the federal or state governments to provide the resources we need to survive. We recommend saving your rent money for basic necessities, food and medications. We need whatever money we have. We can't eat the rent.

Below is a step-by-step guide to protecting yourself as much as you can while not paying rent during the COVID crisis. Included below is a letter to send to your landlord, notifying them that you will not be paying your rent for the month, as well as instructions on how to join online meetings of your Local Chapter of the L.A. Tenants Union, so that so that your decision or inability to pay will be joined with that of tenants across LA. You are not alone. Together we can demand the rent forgiveness we so clearly need. Share this guide with your family, your friends, and your neighbors: **bit.ly/FOODNOTRENT**

STEP ONE

JOIN LATU FOR STRENGTH IN NUMBERS AND PROTECTION FROM RETALIATION

The LA Tenants Union is an autonomous, member-funded union which fights for the human right to housing. From our five years of organizing tenants against evictions, harassment, and displacement, with rent strikes, direct action, and media campaigns, we know there is strength in numbers. One of us is easier to evict than all of us.

So far, the response of our representatives has been far from enough to address the needs of tenants. By joining LATU, you demonstrate the collective power of tenants and help all of us build the power to make demands not requests.

More, joining LATU helps you protect your legal rights. You have rights against retaliation by your landlord for exercising your constitutional right to organize. If you are a member of LATU and your landlord tries to respond to this letter with harassment, a sudden rent increase, or refusal to perform repairs, you may be able to argue in court that this is retaliation against exercising your constitutionally protected right to organize.

STEP TWO

MAIL THE LATU LETTER OF NONPAYMENT TO YOUR LANDLORD AND CITY COUNCIL REP EVERY MONTH YOU CANNOT PAY RENT

Fill out and send this letter to your landlord. Make a copy so that you have documentation that the letter was sent. Send a copy to your representatives in LA's City Council, so they are aware of your situation and the situation of tenants across LA. You can find out who your City Council rep is at:

<https://www.lacity.org/government/popular-information/elected-officials/city-council>

You should send the letter of nonpayment for each month that you cannot pay your rent.

STEP THREE

HANG A GROCERY BAG OUTSIDE YOUR DOOR AND POST IT TO SOCIAL MEDIA WITH #FOODNOTRENT #JoinLATU

Wait... what!? You're participating in this collective Food Not Rent action, whether by necessity or by choice! Hang a grocery bag on your door to show your neighbors what you're up to. You can also use the bag to safely share food, medicine and other necessities with your neighbors. Take a picture of your door with the grocery bag and upload it to social media with the hashtags #FoodNotRent #JoinLATU #CantEatTheRent

STEP FOUR

NOTIFY YOUR LOCAL CHAPTER AND ATTEND A MEETING

Notify your local LA Tenants Union chapter that you have sent a letter of nonpayment to your landlord. Local chapters are there to bring tenants together, provide support and up-to-date information, and provide a space to gather and share in these uncertain times. You can find your local chapter at: <https://latenantsunion.org/en/locals/>

To keep our members safe, LATU local meetings are being held over ZOOM for the duration of the crisis. You can join a meeting by computer or phone. Just follow the link on the website above to see the schedule for local meetings and click the ZOOM link.

STEP FIVE

TALK TO YOUR NEIGHBORS, FAMILY, AND FRIENDS ABOUT YOUR DECISION. ASK THEM IF THEY WANT TO DO THE SAME THING, AND CONNECT THEM WITH THE LA TENANTS UNION

FAQ

1. *Why keep my rent?*

- You may need the money very soon. We don't know what the economic fall out of COVID-19 will be, but the actions of our government so far tell us they will never do enough to ensure that we survive. When every penny counts in such uncertain times, budget for food, medications, and necessities, not your landlord's pockets.
- You just don't have it. If you can't afford to pay the rent in April, you are not alone. You can make your nonpayment visible and act in conversation and in concert with others, joining with others for support and solidarity.
- If you are in a position to choose to pay rent or not, please stand with those who aren't. Your decision to withhold the rent in solidarity with others who can't afford to make that choice protects everyone, and amplifies the demands of the most vulnerable.

Nobody knows how long it's going to take for people to be able to get out of their homes and back to work, or go back into an economic stable situation. The more tenants organize to support each other, the better all of us will do.

2. *Can I be evicted if I send this letter and do not pay my rent?*

There are risks associated with not paying rent. This is why we urge tenants to join LATU and not go through this process alone. However, there *are* a number of protections to help tenants stay in their homes at this time:

- Mayor Eric Garcetti has issued an executive order that places a moratorium on evictions through May 31st, if tenants are unable to pay because of the impacts of the COVID-19 virus. LA's City Council has extended payment of back rent for a year after the crisis. By submitting a letter of nonpayment, you are notifying your landlord that you are invoking these new rules.
- *Eviction is a process.* If you receive a 3-Day Notice to Pay or Quit, you should absolutely respond to this letter, but it is NOT an eviction. The landlord must go through a legal process to file an eviction and take you to court, before he can order you out of your home. This is a lengthy process which could take many months. In that time, you can work with your Local Chapter to secure legal advice and support.
- Courts are closed for at least 60 days. The long backlog of cases works in the favor of tenants, as flooded courts mean it will take even longer for evictions to process. We can use the scale of the problem to add force to our demands

We find it unlikely that already struggling tenants will ever be able to pay back rent and know that eviction moratoriums are just tenant debt. We are asking city, state, and federal representatives to forgive all tenant debt during the crisis. We need a moratorium on rent, not just on evictions. We need rent forgiveness. The more of us that withhold our rent, the less likely they are to evict all of us, and the stronger our demand for rent forgiveness will be. There is tremendous pressure on elected officials to take action. What was unimaginable a few weeks ago is suddenly possible.

3. *What happens if I receive a 3 Day Notice to Pay or Quit?*

IF you receive a 3 Day Notice to Pay your rent or Quit, this means that your landlord is demanding that you pay the rent or they will start the eviction process against you. Get in touch with your LATU Local Chapter about any notice you receive. We recommend sending a response letter to the landlord asking for the rent to be forgiven for the months you cannot pay. This letter reminds your landlord that government regulations including the closure of business and shelter in place have prevented you from earning an income. We also urge you to support our broader campaign for rent forgiveness by joining LATU, organizing other tenants, making phone calls, and participating in upcoming Union activities. Together, we can pressure government officials to remove all requirements to pay back rent accumulated during the COVID-19 crisis. To beat mass evictions, we need mass membership.

4. *Can't we just wait for the Governor or the Mayor or the President to help us?*

The impact that this crisis has on our lives could be irreversible. But while the virus spreads relief is not yet on the way. When federal support comes, we know it will prioritize banks, corporations, and landlords, as we saw in the crisis of 2008. When state support comes, we bet it will defer to cities to work it out themselves. When city support comes, we imagine it will be much like their "eviction moratorium" which is just a six month deferral of rent. In the meantime, we can't wait. Our actions are a way to use our collective power and make the government face the realities of tenants' needs.

4. *What should I do if my landlord retaliates against me?*

You have rights against retaliation and landlord harassment. Write down every incident and threat that you receive, with the date and time of the occurrence and whether there were any witnesses. Take pictures and video. You have a right to record any incident that occurs inside your apartment or home. Try to keep your interactions with your landlord in writing so there is a record you can refer back to. And keep in touch with LATU. Let other members in your local chapter know what you're experiencing so you can strategize about the best way to respond.

5. How can I share this information with my friends, family, and neighbors while keeping social distance?

Reach out to your contacts by text, WhatsApp, or social media. Try putting up flyers in your building's lobby, entrances, with your or LATU's contact information. You can keep a safe distance and still have conversations with neighbours you see, or by knocking on their doors. Make sure to collect their contact information, reach out and share this guide, and encourage them to join LATU.

FURTHER RESOURCES

LATU Tenants Rights Handbook:

<https://latenantsunion.org/en/2017/11/08/la-tenants-union-handbook/>

LATU Tips for Tenants on Police and ICE:

<https://latenantsunion.org/en/2019/06/21/tips-for-tenants-on-police-and-ice/>

LATU Naming the Moment, Reflections on LATU Organizing (2018):

<https://latenantsunion.org/en/2019/09/09/naming-the-moment-2018/>

LATU Crisis Communications Channels:

Twitter: [@LATenantsUnion](https://twitter.com/LATenantsUnion)

Instagram: [@LATenants](https://www.instagram.com/LATenants)

Facebook: [LATenantsUnion](https://www.facebook.com/LATenantsUnion)



Date: _____

Dear _____;

I am a member of the L.A. Tenants Union (LATU). Alongside many tenants in Los Angeles, I am currently facing the simultaneous economic and health crises posed by COVID-19.

This letter is to inform you that these crises are preventing me from paying this month's rent.

I will submit a copy of this letter to my City Council member, to make sure that my representatives are aware of my situation and the situation of tenants across L.A.. As they know, protecting the health of ourselves and others requires us to stay in our homes.

If you have any questions feel free to contact _____ at _____, LATU representative

Thank you for your understanding.

Sincerely,

Address: _____



Fecha: _____

Estimado/a _____:

Soy miembro del Sindicato de inquilinos de Los Ángeles. En el presente, al igual que muchos inquilinos en Los Ángeles, estoy enfrentando las crisis económicas y de salud causadas por COVID-19.

Esta carta es para informarle que estas crisis no permiten que yo pueda pagar la renta este mes.

Estoy enviando una copia de esta carta a mi representante del Consejo de la Ciudad, para asegurarme de que mis representantes entiendan mi situación y la situación de los inquilinos en Los Ángeles. Nuestros representantes saben que para proteger nuestra salud y la de los demás se requiere que nos quedemos en nuestras casas.

Si usted tiene preguntas, puede llamar a _____ representante de LATU

Gracias por su comprensión.

Atentamente,

Dirección: _____

Cc: Capítulo Local del Sindicato de Inquilinos de Los Angeles
Miembro de Consejo

